

Medea

FREELY ADAPTED FROM THE
"MEDEA" OF EURIPIDES

By Robinson Jeffers

USED



SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

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MEDEA

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

THE NURSE: *An old slave-woman, Medea's nurse in childhood, now her devoted servant.*

THE TUTOR: *An old man, a slave, tutor to Medea's children.*

THE CHILDREN: *Two little boys.*

CHORUS: *Corinthian women of various types.*

MEDEA

CREON: *A man of fifty, perhaps; the ruler of Corinth.*

JASON: *Famous hero and explorer, now settling toward middle age.*

ÆGEUS (E'GEUS—accent on first syllable): *ruler of Athens, visiting Corinth. A kindly person, a little older than Creon.*

A YOUNG MAN: *A slave of Jason's.*

Also men in attendance on Creon, Jason, Ægeus, and serving women belonging to Medea.

Medea

ACT ONE

HOUSE LIGHTS UP

CURTAIN

LIGHT CUE #1 UP

LIGHT CUE #1 DOWN

SCRIM at front of scene. MUSIC, LIGHT CUE #2,
SEA EFFECT (all together).

The NURSE comes from the door Left toward the
front of the stage, as soon as SCRIM is fully drawn.

LIGHT CUE #3

SEA EFFECT STOPS

THE NURSE. (*Reaches up stage Right position, then
speaks*)

I wish the long ship Argo had never passed that peri-
lous channel between the Symplegades,

I wish the pines that made her mast and her oars still
waved in the wind on Mount Pelion, and the gray
fishhawk

Still nested in them, the great adventurers had never
voyaged

Into the Asian sunrise to the shores of morning for
the Golden Fleece

(LIGHT CUE #4.)

(*Crosses up to 3rd step, Center.*)

For then my mistress Medea

Would never have seen Jason, nor loved and saved him,
nor cut herself off from home to come with him

Into this country of the smiling chattering Greeks and
the roofs of Corinth: over which I see evil

Hang like a cloud. For she is not meek but fierce, and the daughter of a king.

Yet at first all went well. The folk of Corinth were kind to her, they were proud of her beauty, and Jason loved her. Happy is the house

Where the man and the woman love and are faithful.
(Sits on 3rd step)

Now all is changed; all is black hatred. For Jason has turned from her; he calls the old bond a barbarian mating, not a Greek marriage; he has cast her off

And wedded the yellow-haired child of Creon, the ruler here. He wants worldly advantage, fine friends,

And a high place in Corinth. For these he is willing to cast Medea like a harlot, and betray the children That she has borne him. He is not wise, I think

(LIGHT CUE #5)

But Medea Lies in the house, broken with pain and rage; she will neither eat nor drink, except her own tears, She turns her face toward the earth, remembering her father's house and her native land, which she abandoned

For the love of this man: who now despises her. And if I try to speak comfort to her she only stares at me, great eyes like stones. She is like a stone on the shore

Or a wave of the sea, and I think she hates Even her children.

(Rises and crosses to rock down Right)

She is learning what it is to be a foreigner, cast out, alone and despised.

She will never learn to be humble, she will never learn to drink insult

Like harmless water. O I'm in terror of her: whether she'll thread a knife through her own heart,

Or whether she'll hunt the bridegroom and his new

bride, or what more dreadful evil stalks in the forest

Of her dark mind. I know that Jason would have been wiser to tempt a lioness, or naked-handed Steal the whelps of a tiger.

(From up Right she sees MEDEA'S BOYS coming with their TUTOR, ELDER BOY first with seashell, YOUNGER BOY on TUTOR'S back.)

Here comes the happy children. Little they know Of their mother's grief. (LIGHT CUE #6)

(During this speech TUTOR lets BOY off his back. BOYS go up and sit up Right corner of house. TUTOR crosses down Center to Left of NURSE.)

THE TUTOR.

Old servant of my lady, why do you stand out here, keeping watch in solitude With those grim eyes? Is it some trouble of your own that you are lamenting? I should think Medea Would need your care.

THE NURSE.

It is all one to Medea, whether I am there or here. Yes, it is mine, My trouble. My lady's grief is my grief. And it has hurt me So that I had to come out and speak it to the earth and sky.

THE TUTOR.

Is she still in that deep despair?

THE NURSE.

You are lucky, Old watchdog of Jason's boys. I envy you, You do not see her. This evil is not declining, it is just at dawn. I dread the lion-eyed Glare of its noon.

THE TUTOR.

Is she so wrought? Yet neither you nor Medea

Knows the latest and worst.

THE NURSE. (*Rises from rock*)

What? What?

THE TUTOR. (*Crosses to Center*)

I shouldn't

have spoken.

THE NURSE. (*She follows him to Left Center. As she does this BOYS cross down to rock. One sits on rock and other sits on ground at his feet*)

Tell me the truth, old man. You and

I are two slaves, we can trust each other,
We can keep secrets.

THE TUTOR

I heard them saying—when we
walked beside the holy fountain Peirene,
Where the old men sit in the sun on the stone benches
—they were saying that Creon, the lord of this
land,
Intends to drive out Medea and the children with her,
these innocent boys, out of this house
And out of Corinth, and they must wander through the
wild world
Homeless and helpless.

THE NURSE

I don't believe it. Ah, no! Jason
may hate the mother, but he would hardly
Let his sons be cast out.

THE TUTOR.

Well—he has made a new
alliance.

He is not a friend of this house.

THE NURSE. (*She crosses below TUTOR to Left*)
If this were true!—

MEDEA. (*Within house. She is Asiatic and laments loudly*)
Death.

THE NURSE

Listen! I hear her voice

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my
children. Destruction.

THE NURSE

Take the children away, keep them away from her.
Take them to the other door. Quickly.

(*During "Deaths" YOUNGER BOY rises from rock. TUTOR crosses, picks him up and exits Left, followed by ELDER BOY. They go out, toward rear door of the house. THE NURSE looks after them, wringing her hands.*)

MEDEA.

That's the word. Grind, crush, burn. Destruction. Ai—
Ai—

THE NURSE. (*Wringing her hands*)

This is my terror:

To hear her always harking back to the children, like
a fierce hound at fault. O unhappy one,
They're not to blame.

(*Sits step Right of pillar down Left.*)

(*LIGHT CUE #7*)

MEDEA. (*Within*)

If any god hears me: let me die.

Ah, rotten, rotten, rotten: death is the only
Water to wash this dirt.

(*FIRST and SECOND WOMAN are coming in up Right, but the NURSE does not yet notice them. She is intent on MEDEA's cries and her own thoughts.*)

THE NURSE

Oh, it's a bad thing
(*LIGHT CUE #8*)

To be born of high race, and brought up wilful and
powerful in a great house, unruled.
And ruling many: for then if misfortune comes it is
unendurable, it drives you mad. I say that poor
people

Are happier: the little commoners and humble people,
the poor in spirit: they can lie low
Under the wind and live:

(Enter THIRD WOMAN; joins FIRST and
SECOND up Right Center.)

while the tall oaks and cloud-
raking mountain pines go mad in the storm,
Writhe, groan and crash.

MEDEA.

Ai!

THE NURSE.

This is the wild and terrible justice of God: it brings
on great persons
The great disasters.

MEDEA.

Ai!!!

THE NURSE. (*Becomes aware of the WOMEN who
have come in, and is startled from her reverie. FIRST
WOMAN crosses down Center*)

What do you want?

FIRST WOMAN.

I hear her crying again: it
is dreadful.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses down to Right of FIRST
WOMAN*)

Her lamentation.

She is beautiful and deep in grief: we couldn't help
coming.

THIRD WOMAN. (*Crosses down to Right of SECOND
WOMAN*)

We are friends of this house and its trouble hurts us.

THE NURSE.

You are right, friends; it is not a home. It is broken.

A house of grief and of weeping.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Hear me, God, let me
die. What I need: all dead, all dead, all dead

(THIRD WOMAN crosses down Right of rock.)

Under the great cold stones. For a year and a thousand

years and another thousand: cold as the stones,
cold,
But noble again, proud, straight and silent, crimson-
cloaked
In the blood of our wounds.

(FIRST WOMAN crosses to 3rd step, Center.)

FIRST WOMAN.

O shining sky, divine earth,

Harken not to the song that this woman sings.

It is not her mind's music; her mind is not here.

She does not know what she prays for.

Pain and wrath are the singers.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses to second step, facing
door*).

Unhappy one,

(LIGHT CUE #9)

Never pray for death, never pray for death,

He is here all too soon.

He strikes from the clear sky like a hawk,

He hides behind green leaves, or he waits

Around the corner of the wall.

O never pray for death, never pray for death—

Because that prayer will be answered.

MEDEA. (*The rise and fall of her voice indicate that
she is prowling back and forth beyond the main door-
way, like a caged animal*)

I know poisons. I know the bright teeth of steel. I
know fire. But I will not be mocked by my enemies,

(THIRD WOMAN crosses up Right of rock to
Right Center.)

And I will not endure pity. Pity and contempt are
sister and brother, twin-born. I will not die tamely.

I will not allow blubber-eyed pity, nor contempt either,
to snivel over the stones of my tomb.

I am not a Greek woman.

THIRD WOMAN. (*Crosses to step Center*)

No, a barbarian woman from
savage Colchis, at the bitter end

Of the Black Sea. Does she boast of that?

SECOND WOMAN.

She doesn't

know what she is saying.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Poisons. Death-magic. The sharp sword. The hemp rope. Death-magic.

Death—

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses down Right of rock.*

THIRD WOMAN *joins her*)

I hate Jason, who made this sorrow.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Crosses to NURSE in front of doors*)

Old and honored servant of a great house, do you think it is wise

To leave your lady alone in there, except perhaps a few slaves, building that terrible acropolis

Of deadly thoughts? We Greeks believe that solitude is very dangerous, great passions grow into monsters

In the dark of the mind; but if you share them with loving friends they remain human, they can be endured.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Ai!

FIRST WOMAN.

I think you ought to persuade Medea to come from the dark dwelling, and speak with us, before her heart breaks,

Or she does harm to herself. She has lived among us, we've learned to love her, we'd gladly tell her so.

It might comfort her spirit. (*LIGHT CUE #10.*)

THE NURSE.

Do you think so? She

wouldn't listen

(*Door BOLT is heard. NURSE rises. FIRST WOMAN crosses down Right, joining other two WOMEN, and sits on rock*)

—Oh, oh, she is coming!

Speak carefully to her: make your words a soft music.

(*MEDEA comes through the doorway, propping herself against one of the pillars, and stands staring.*)

THE NURSE.

Oh, my dear, my poor child.

(*NURSE sits.*)

SECOND WOMAN. (*Whispering*)

They say she is dangerous. Look at her eyes.

FIRST WOMAN.

She is a witch, but not evil. She can make old men young again: she did it for Jason's father.

THIRD WOMAN.

All the people of her country are witches. They know about drugs and magic. They are savages, but they have a wild wisdom.

SECOND WOMAN.

Poor soul, it hasn't helped this one much.

MEDEA. (*She does not see the gaping and whispering WOMEN*)

I will look at the light of the sun, this last time. I wish from that blue sky the white wolf of lightning

Would leap, and burst my skull and my brain, and like a burning babe cling to these breasts— Ai!—Ai!

(*She checks and looks fiercely at the WOMEN below*)

Someone is here?

(*Her hostile eyes range back and forth; she sees the WOMEN clearly now, and assumes full self-control. Her voice is cautious and insincere*)

I did not know I had visitors.—Women

of Corinth:

If anything has been spoken too loudly here, consider That I believed I was alone; and I have some provocation. You've come—let me suppose

With love and sympathy—to peer at my sorrow. I understand well enough

That nothing is ever private in a Greek city; whoever withholds anything

Is thought sullen or proud—

(With irony)

undemocratic

I think you call it. This is not always just, but we know
that justice, at least on earth,

Is a name, not a fact; and as for me, I wish to avoid
any appearance

Of being—proud. Of what? Of affliction? I will show
you my naked heart.

(The THREE WOMEN rise; cross to Center.)

You know that my lord Jason

Has left me and made a second marriage, with the
bright-haired child

Of wealth and power. I too was a child of power, but
not in this country; and I spent my power

For love of Jason. I poured it out before him like water,
I made him drink it like wine. I gave him

Success and fame; I saved him his precious life; not
once, many times. You may have heard what I did
for him:

I betrayed my father for him, I killed my brother to
save him; I made my own land to hate me forever;

And I fled west with Jason in the Greek ship, under the
thunder of the sail, weeping and laughing,

That huge journey through the Black Sea and the
Bosphorus, where the rocks clang together,
through the Sea of Marmora,

And through Hellespont,

(LIGHT CUE #11)

watched by the spearmen of

wealthy Troy, and home to Greek water: his home,
my exile,

My endless exile.

(Crosses to pillar Left of house)

And here I have loved him and borne
him sons; and this—man—

Has left me and taken Creon's daughter, to enjoy her
fortune, and put aside her soft yellow hair

And kiss her young mouth.

(MEDEA stands rigid, struggling for self-control.)

FIRST WOMAN.

She is terrible. Stone with stone eyes.

SECOND WOMAN.

Look: the foam-flake on her lip, that flickers with her
breathing.

THIRD WOMAN.

She is pitiable: she is under great injuries.

MEDEA. *(Low-voiced)*

I do not know what other woman—I do not know how
much a Greek woman

Will endure. The people of my race are somewhat rash
and intemperate. As for me, I want simply to die.

(She sits at pillar Left)

But Jason is not to smile at his bride over my grave,
nor that great man Creon

Hang wreaths and make a feast-day in Corinth. Or let
the wreaths be bright blinding fire, and the songs
a high wailing,

And the wine, blood.

FIRST WOMAN. *(Crosses to Center)*

Daughter of sorrow, beware.

(LIGHT CUE #12)

It is dangerous to dream of wine; it is worse

To speak of wailing or blood:

For the images that the mind makes

Find a way out, they work into life.

MEDEA.

Let them work into life!

FIRST WOMAN.

There are evils that cannot be cured by evil.

Patience remains, and the gods watch all.

MEDEA. *(Dully, without hope)*

Let them watch my enemies go down in blood.

*(First TRUMPET off up Right is heard. The
THREE WOMEN cross up Right.)*

SECOND WOMAN.

Medea, beware!

Some great person is coming.—

(Second TRUMPET is heard)

It is Creon himself.

(Third TRUMPET)

THIRD WOMAN.

Creon is coming.

(The THREE WOMEN cross down stage of rock Right.)

THE NURSE.

He is dark with anger. O my lady—
my child—bend in this wind,
And not be broken!

(MEDEA rises. CREON comes in up Right with MEN attending him. The WOMEN move to one side. He speaks to MEDEA, with an angry gesture toward WOMEN.)

CREON. *(At Center)*

You have admirers, I see. Abate your pride: these
people will not be with you where you are going.
(A pause. MEDEA does not answer. CREON brings his wrath under control and crosses up to second step to Right of MEDEA)

Medea, woman of the stone forehead and hate-filled
eyes: I have made my decision. I have decided
That you must leave this land at once and go into
banishment

THREE WOMEN.

Oohh!

CREON.

with your children.

THREE WOMEN.

Oohh.

CREON.

I intend to remove

A root of disturbance out of the soil of Corinth. I am
here to see to it. I will not return home
Until it is done.

(The THREE WOMEN sit.)

MEDEA.

You mean—banishment?

CREON.

Exile: banishment:
go where you may, Medea, but here
You abide no more.

MEDEA.

—I with my children?

CREON.

I will not

take them away from you.

MEDEA.

The children, my lord—
(Her lips move angrily, but the voice is not heard.)

CREON.

What are you muttering?

MEDEA.

Nothing—I am praying to my gods for wisdom,
And you for mercy. My sons are still very young,
tender and helpless. You know, my lord,
What exile means—to wander with fear and famine
for guide and driver, through all the wild winter
storms

And the rage of the sun; and beg a bread-crust and be
derided; pelted with stones in the villages,
Held a little lower than the scavenger dogs, kicked,
scorned and slaved—the children, my lord,
Are Jason's children. Your chosen friend, I believe,
and now

Even closer bound. And as for me, your servant, O
master of Corinth, what have I done? Why
Must I be cast?

CREON.

I will tell you frankly: because you
nourish rancorous ill will toward persons
Whom I intend to protect: I send you out before you've
time to do harm here. And you are notorious
For occult knowledge: sorcery, poisons, magic. Men
say you can even sing down the moon from heaven,
And make the holy stars to falter and run backward,
against the purpose
And current of nature. Ha? As to that I know not: I
know you are dangerous. You threaten my daughter:
you have to go.

MEDEA.

But I wish her well, my lord! I wish her all happiness.
I hope that Jason may be as kind to her
As—to me.

CREON.

That is your wish?

MEDEA.

I misspoke. I thought of
old days—
(*She seems to weep.*)

CREON.

I acknowledge, Medea,
That you have some cause for grief. I all the more
must guard against your dark wisdom and bitter
heart.

MEDEA.

You misjudge me cruelly. It is true that I have some
knowledge of drugs and medicines: I can some-
times cure sickness.

Is that a crime? These dark rumors, my lord,
Are only the noise of popular gratitude.

(*Crosses down to one step above him*)

You must have observed

it often: if any person

Knows a little more than the common man, the people
suspect him. If he brings a new talent,
How promptly the hateful whispers begin. But you

are not a common man, lord of Corinth; you
Will not fear knowledge. (*LIGHT CUE #13*)

CREON.

No. Nor change my decision.

I am here to see you leave this house and the city:
And not much time. Move quickly, gather your things
and go. I pity you, Medea,
But you must go.

(*He crosses off steps, with back to her down
Right Center.*)

MEDEA.

You pity me? You—pity me?

(*She comes close to him, wild with rage*)

I will endure a dog's pity or a wart-grown toad's. May
God who hears me— We shall see in the end
Who's to be pitied.

(*NURSE rises, crosses in to steps. MEDEA
crosses down Left, then up Right between
pillar and edge of house, then back to NURSE in
her arms.*)

CREON.

Yes, and I'll keep her safe of your
female hatred: therefore I send you
Out of this land.

(*NURSE resumes her sitting position down
Left.*)

MEDEA.

It is not true, I am not jealous. I
never hated her.
Jealous for the sake of Jason? I am far past wanting
Jason, my lord. You took him and gave him to her,
And I will say you did well, perhaps wisely. Your
daughter is loved by all: she is beautiful: if I were
near her
I would soon love her.

CREON.

You can speak sweetly enough,
you can make honey in your mouth like a brown
bee

When it serves your turn.

MEDEA.

Not honey: the truth.

CREON.

Trust
you or not, you are going out of this country,
Medea.

What I decide is fixed;

(MEDEA crosses away from him to Center.)

it is like the firm rocks of Acro-
corinth, which neither earthquake can move
Nor a flood of tears melt. Make ready quickly: I have
a guest in my house. I should return to him.

THE NURSE. *(Comes to Left of MEDEA and speaks to her)*

What guest? O my lady, ask him

Who is the guest? If powerful and friendly

He might be a refuge for us—

MEDEA. *(Pays no attention to her. Crosses; kneels; to CREON)*

I know that your will is granite. But even on the harsh
face of a granite mountain some flowers of mercy
May grow in season. Have mercy on my little sons,
Creon,

Though there is none for me.

(She reaches to embrace his knees. He steps backward from her.)

CREON.

How long, woman? This
is decided; done; finished.

*(NURSE crosses back Left and sits down.)*MEDEA. *(Rising from her knees, turns half away from him)*

I am not a beggar.

I will not trouble you. I shall not live long.

*(Crosses two steps to Left; turns to him again)*Sire: grant me a few hours yet, one day to prepare in,
one little day

Before I go out of Corinth forever.

CREON.

What? No! I told

you. The day is today, Medea, this day.

And the hour is now.

MEDEA.

There are no flowers on this
mountain: not one violet, not one anemone.

Your face, my lord, is like flint.—If I could find the
right words, if some god would lend me a touch of
eloquence,

I'd show you my heart.

(Crosses to CREON)

I'd lift it out of my breast and
turn it over in my hands; you'd see how pure it is
Of any harm or malice toward you or your household.

(She holds out her hands to him)

Look at it: not a speck: look, my lord. They call mercy
The jewel of kings. I am praying

To you as to one of the gods: destroy us not utterly.

To go out with no refuge, nothing prepared,
Is plain death: I would rather kill myself quickly and
here. If I had time but to ask the slaves

And strolling beggars where to go, how to live: and I
must gather some means: one or two jewels

And small gold things I have,

(Crosses away from CREON to Left)

to trade them for bread

and goat's milk.

(Crosses up steps to Center of doorway)

Wretched, wretched, wretched I am,
I and my boys.

(She kneels again)

I beseech you, Creon,
By the soft yellow hair and cool smooth forehead and
the white knees
Of that young girl who is now Jason's bride: lend me
this inch of time: one day—half a day.
For this one is now half gone—and I will go my sad
course and vanish in the morning quietly as dew
That drops on the stones at dawn and is dry at sunrise.
You will never again be troubled by any word
Or act of mine. And this I pray you for your dear
child's sake. Oh Creon, what is half a day
In all the rich years of Corinth?

CREON.

I will think of it. I am

no tyrant.

I have been merciful to my own hurt, many times.

Even to myself I seem to be foolish

If I grant you this thing— No, Medea,

I will not grant it.

*(THREE WOMEN rise, cross down Right of
CREON, imploringly)*

Well— We shall watch you: as a
hawk does a viper. What harm could she do
In the tail of one day? A ruler ought to be ruthless,
but I am not. I am a fool

In my own eyes, whatever the world may think. I
can be gruff with warriors; a woman weeping

(MEDEA weeps.)

Floods me off course.—Take it, then. Make your
preparations.

But if tomorrow's sun shines on you here—Medea,
you die—

*(MEDEA and WOMEN make a gesture of
thanks.)*

Enough words. Thank me not. I want
my hands

Washed of this business.

*(He departs quickly up Right, followed by
his MEN. MEDEA rises from her knees.)*

MEDEA.

I will thank you.

And the whole world will hear of it.

*(MEDEA crosses around to Right of house
on top step; makes a violent gesture after
him, then sits at pillar Right.)*

FIRST WOMAN. *(Crosses up Center watching him
out then turns to other WOMEN)*

I have seen this man's arrogance, I watched and heard
him.

I am of Corinth, and I say that Corinth
Is not well ruled.

SECOND WOMAN. *(Crosses up Center. THREE
WOMEN join hands at Center on end of this speech)*

The city where even a woman, even a foreigner,
Suffers unjustly the rods of power
Is not well ruled.

(THREE WOMEN take a step to MEDEA.)

FIRST WOMAN.

Unhappy Medea, what haven, what sanctuary, where
will you wander?

Which of the gods, Medea,
Drives you through waves of woe, the mooring broken,
the hawsers and the anchor-head,
Hopeless from harbor?

MEDEA.

—This man—this barking dog

—this gulled fool—

(MEDEA rises)

gods of my father's country,
You saw me low on my knees before the great dog of
Corinth; humble, holding my heart in my hands
For a dog to bite—break this dog's teeth!

(LIGHT CUE #14)

(WOMEN cross down stage of rock Right.)

Women: it is

a bitter thing to be a woman.

A woman is weak for warfare, she must use cunning.

Men boast their battles: I tell you this, and we know it:

(Starts down steps Center)

It is easier to stand in battle three times, in the front line, in the stabbing fury, than to bear one child. And a woman, they say, can do no good but in childbirth. It may be so. She can do evil;

(WOMEN make pleading gesture to her)

she can do evil.

(She snarls at them and they turn away)

I wept before that tall dog, I wept my tears before him, I degraded my knees to him, I gulled and flattered him.

O triple fool, he has given me

(She crosses up Right Center. FIRST WOMAN sits on rock Right)

all that I needed: a little time, a space of time.

(Crosses back to Left Center)

Death is dearer to me

Than what I am now; and if today by sunset the world has not turned, and turned sharp too—let your dog Creon

Send two or three slaves to kill me and a cord to strangle me: I will stretch out

My throat to it. But I have a bitter hope, women. I begin to see light

Through the dark wood, between the monstrous trunks of the trees, at the end of the tangled forest an eyehole,

A pin-point of light:

(LIGHT CUE #15)

I shall not die perhaps

As a pigeon dies. Nor like an innocent lamb, that feels a hand on its head and looks up from the knife

To the man's face and dies.—No, like some yellow-eyed beast that has killed its hunters let me lie down

On the hounds' bodies and the broken spears.—Then

how to strike them? What means to use? There are so many

Doors through which painful death may glide in and catch— Which one, which one?

(She stands meditating down Left. The NURSE comes from behind her and speaks to the FIRST WOMAN.)

THE NURSE

Tell me: do you

know what guest

Is in Creon's house?

FIRST WOMAN.

What?—Oh. An Athenian ship

came from the north last night: it is Ægeus.

The lord of Athens.

THE NURSE

Ægeus! My lady knows him: I

believe he will help us. Some god has brought him here,

Some savior god.

FIRST WOMAN.

He is leaving, I think, today.

THE NURSE *(Hobbling back toward MEDEA)*

My lady!

Lord Ægeus

Is here in Corinth, Creon's guest. Ægeus of Athens.

(MEDEA looks at her silently, without attention.)

If you will see him and speak him fairly,

We have a refuge.

MEDEA.

I have things in my hand to do. Be

quiet.

THE NURSE

Oh, listen to me!

You are driven out of Corinth; you must find shelter.

Ægeus of Athens is here.

(MEDEA turns from her. The NURSE catches

at her clothing, servile but eager, slave and mother at the same time.)

MEDEA. (*Angrily turning on her*)
What's that to me? (*LIGHT CUE #16*)

THE NURSE. (*Kneels at her feet*)
I lifted you in my arms when you were—this long. I gave you milk from these breasts, that are now dead leaves.

I saw the little beautiful body straighten and grow tall: Oh—child—almost my child—how can I Not try to save you? Life is better than death—

MEDEA.

Not now.

THE NURSE.
Time's running out!

MEDEA.

I have time. Oh, I have time.
It would be good to stand here a thousand years and think of nothing
But the deaths of three persons.

THE NURSE.

Ai! There's no hope then.
Ai, child, if you could do this red thing you dream of, all Corinth

Would pour against you.

MEDEA.

After my enemies are punished
and I have heard the last broken moan—Corinth?
What's that? I'll sleep. I'll sleep well. I am alone
against all: and so weary
That it is pitiful. (*TRUMPET is heard off Right.*)

(*MEDEA sits. NURSE rises, wringing her hands. On trumpet call the THREE WOMEN cross up Right.*)

FIRST WOMAN.

Look: who is coming? I see the
sunlight glitter on lanceheads.

SECOND WOMAN.
Oh, it is Jason!

THIRD WOMAN.
Jason's Medea's worst enemy, who should have been
Her dearest protector.

(*MEDEA leans wearily against one of the pillars of the doorway, her back to the stage, unconscious of what they are saying. JASON enters in haste up Right, followed by armed ATTENDANTS, and speaks angrily.*)

JASON. (*Crossing to Center on 2nd step*)
What business have you here,
you women
Clustered like buzzing bees at the hive-door?
Where is Medea?

(*They do not answer for a moment, but look involuntarily toward MEDEA, and JASON sees her. She jerks and stiffens at the sound of his voice, but does not turn.*)

FIRST WOMAN. (*Pointing*)
There: mourning for what you have
done.

(*NURSE takes a step above MEDEA, disclosing her to JASON.*)

JASON.
Ha? What she has done.
Not I. Not by my will she and my sons are exiled.
MEDEA. (*Slowly turns and faces him, her head high, rigid with inner violence*)
Is there another dog here?

(*THREE WOMEN sit on steps up Right Center.*)

JASON.

So, Medea,
You have once more affronted and insulted the head
of Corinth. This is not the first time
I've seen what a fool anger is. You might have lived
here happily, secure and honored—I hoped you
would—
By being just a little decently respectful toward those
in power. Instead you had to go mad with anger
And talk yourself into exile. To me it matters little
what you say about me, but rulers are sensitive.
Time and again I've smoothed down Creon's indigna-
tion, then you like a madwoman, like a possessed
imbecile,
Wag your head and let the words flow again; you
never cease
From speaking evil against him and his family. So
now— Call yourself lucky, Medea,
Not to get worse than exile.

(Crosses a few steps to MEDEA on 2nd step)

In spite of all this, I have
your interest at heart and am here to help you.
Exile's a bitter business. I want to make some pro-
vision for you. I wish you no harm,
Although you hate me.

*(He waits for her to speak, but she is silent.
He continues)*

And in particular the children,
my sons; our sons.—You might have been decent
enough
To have thought of our sons.
MEDEA. *(Slowly)*

Did you consider them
When you betrayed this house?
JASON.

Certainly I considered
them. It was my hope that they would grow up
here,
And I, having married power, could protect and favor
them. And if perhaps, after many years, I become

Dynast of Corinth—for that is Creon's desire, to make
me his heir—our sons
Would have been a king's sons— I hope to help them
wherever they go: but now of course must look
forward
To younger children.

(Steps down off steps and turns from her.)

MEDEA. *(Trembling)*

Ah—it's enough. Something might
happen. It is—likely that—something might happen
To the bride and the marriage.

JASON.

I'll guard against it. But
evidently Creon is right to be rid of you.

*(He crosses as if to go off Right. She stops
him when he is up Right Center. He gives
helmet to SLAVE; crosses down Right.)*

MEDEA. *(Rises and crosses to Center)*

Have you finished now? I thought I would let you
speak on and spread out your shamlessness
Before these women: the way a Tyrian trader unrolls
his rare fabrics: "Do you like it, ladies?"

(LIGHT CUE #17)

It is the
Dog's daughter's husband. It is a brave person: it has
finally got up its courage—with a guard of
spears—

To come and look me in the face.

*(JASON turns away from her. MEDEA makes
gestures as if to take him in her arms, then
stops)*

O Jason: how have you
pulled me down
To this hell of vile thoughts? I did not use to talk like
a common woman. I loved you once:
And I am ashamed of it:

*(JASON sits rock Right. She crosses two steps
Left)*

but there are some things
That ought to be remembered by you and me. That
blue day when we drove through the Hellespont
Into Greek sea, and the great-shouldered heroes were
singing at the oars, and those birds flying
Through the blown foam: that day was too fine I sup-
pose

For Creon's daughter's man to remember

(*JASON rises as if to leave.*)

—but you might remember
Whether I cheated my father for you and tamed the
fire-breathing

Brazen-hoofed bulls; and whether I saved your life in
the field of the teeth; and you might remember
Whether I poisoned the great serpent and got you the
Golden Fleece; and fled with you, and killed my
brother

When he pursued us, making myself abominable
In my own home; and then in yours I got your enemy
Pelias hacked to death

By his own daughter's hands—whatever these fine
Corinthian friends of yours

May say against my rapid and tricky wisdom: you it
has served,

You it has served well:

(*JASON starts to speak.*)

here are five times, if I counted
right—and all's not counted—

That your adventure would have been dusty death
If I'd not saved you—but now you think that your
adventures are over; you are safe and high placed
in Corinth,

And will need me no more.

It is a bit of a dog, isn't it,
women? It is well qualified
To sleep with the dog's daughter.

(*JASON makes a gesture of wrath.*)

But for me, Jason, me
driven by the hairy snouts from the quadruped
marriage-bed,

What refuge does your prudent kindness advise? Shall
I fly home to Colchis—

To put my neck in the coil of a knotted rope, for the
crimes

I served you with? Or shall I go and kneel to the
daughter of Pelias? They would indeed be happy
To lay their hands on my head: holding the very knives
and the cleavers

That carved their sire. The world is a little closed to me,
eh?

By the things I have done for you

(*LIGHT CUE #18*)

(*Crosses away from him to down Center.*)

THE NURSE.

I'll go to the palace

And seek Ægeus. There is no other hope.

(*She hurries out door Left.*)

JASON. (*Slowly crossing to Center to Right of
MEDEA*)

I see, Medea,

You have been a very careful merchant of benefits.

You forget none, you keep a strict reckoning.

But—

Some little things that I on my side have done for you
Ought to be in the books too: as, for example, that I
carried you

Out of the dirt and superstition of Asiatic Colchis into
the rational

Sunlight of Greece, and the marble music of the Greek
temples: is that no benefit? And I have brought
you

To meet the first minds of our time, and to speak as
an equal with the great heroes and the rulers of
cities:

Is that no benefit? And now—this grievous thing that
you hate me for:

That I have married Creon's young daughter, little
Creusa:

(*MEDEA sits and step.*)

do you think I did it like a boy or a woman,

Out of blind passion? I did it to achieve power here;
and I'd have used that power to protect
You and our sons, but your jealous madness has
muddled everything. And finally:

(NURSE appears behind house and exits up
Right. JASON crosses above MEDEA to top
step)

As to those acts of service you so loudly boast—whom
do I thank for them? I thank divine Venus, the
goddess

Who makes girls fall in love. You did them because
you had to do them; Venus compelled you; I
Enjoyed her favor.

(Crosses down two steps to her Left)

A man dares things, you know; he
makes his adventure
In the cold eye of death; and if the gods care for him
They appoint an instrument to save him; if not, he dies.
You were that instrument.

MEDEA.

Here it is: the lowest.

The obscene dregs; the slime and the loathing; the
muddy bottom of a mouthed cup: when a scoundrel
begins

To invoke the gods

JASON.

Ha!

MEDEA.

You had better go, Jason. Vulgarly
Is a contagious disease; and in a moment what could I
do but spit at you like a peasant, or curse you
Like a drunken slave? You had better take yourself
back to

"Little Creusa."

JASON.

I came to help you and save you if
possible.

(Reaches down and touches her arm.)

MEDEA.

Your help

Is not wanted. Go. Go.

JASON. (Crosses below her to Right Center, then
stops)

If I could see my boys—

MEDEA.

Go

quickly.

JASON.

Yours the regret then.

(LIGHT CUE #19)

(Exits up Right. Watching him go, MEDEA
strokes her wrist and hand to the tips of the
spread fingers, as if she were scraping off
slime.)

MEDEA.

This is it. I did not surely know it: loathing is all. This
flesh

He has touched and fouled. These hands that wrought
for him, these knees

That ran his errands. This body that took his—what
they call love, and made children of it. If I could
peel off

The flesh, the children, the memory—

(Again she scarifies one hand with the other.
She looks at her hand)

Poor misused

hand; poor defiled arm; your bones
Are not unshapely. If I could tear off the flesh and be
bones; naked bones;

Salt-scoured bones on the shore

At home in Colchis.

FIRST WOMAN. (Rises and crosses down Right)
God keep me from fire and the hunger of the sword,
Save me from the hateful sea and the jagged lightning,
And the violence of love.

SECOND WOMAN. (Joins FIRST WOMAN)

A little love is a joy in the house,
A little fire is a jewel against frost and darkness.

(During these two speeches THIRD WOMAN

*goes up Right Center, then returns to
WOMEN down Right.)*

FIRST WOMAN.

A great love is a fire
That burns the beams of the roof.
The doorposts are flaming and the house falls.

(THIRD WOMAN kneels.)

A great love is a lion in the cattle-pen,
The herd goes mad, the heifers run bawling
And the claws are in their flanks.
Too much love is an armed robber in the treasury.
He has killed the guards and he walks in blood.

SECOND WOMAN.

And now I see the black end,
The end of great love, and God save me from it:
The unburied horror, the unbridled hatred,
The vultures tearing a corpse!
God keep me clean of those evil beaks.

THIRD WOMAN.

What is she doing, that woman,
Staring like stone, staring?

(MEDEA looks up.)

Oh, she has moved now.

MEDEA.

Annihilation. The word is pure music: annihilation. To
annihilate the past—

Is not possible: but its fruit in the present—
Can be nipped off. Am I to look in my sons' eyes
And see Jason's forever? How could I endure the end-
less defilement, those lives
That mix Jason and me? Better to be clean
Bones on the shore. Bones have no eyes at all, how
could they weep? White bones
On the Black Sea shore—

Oh, but that's far. Not yet.

Corinth must howl first.

FIRST WOMAN.

The holy fountains flow up from the earth,
The smoke of sacrifice flows up from the earth,

The eagle and the wild swan fly up from the earth,
Righteousness also
Has flown up from the earth to the feet of God.
It is not here, but up there; peace and pity are de-
parted;

Hatred is here; hatred is heavy, it clings to the earth.
Love blows away, hatred remains.

SECOND WOMAN.

Women hate war, but men will wage it again.
Women may hate their husbands, and sons their
fathers,
But women will never hate their own children.

FIRST WOMAN.

But as for me, I will do good to my husband,
I will love my sons and daughters, and adore the gods.

MEDEA.

If I should go into the house with a sharp knife
To the man and his bride—

(MEDEA rises. THIRD WOMAN rises.)

Or if I could fire the room they sleep in, and hear them
Wake in the white of the fire, and cry to each other,
and howl like dogs.

THREE WOMEN.

Oh!!!

(Cringe together.)

MEDEA.

And howl and die—
But I might fail; I might be cut down first;
The knife might turn in my hand, or the fire not burn,
and my enemies could laugh at me.
No: I have subtler means, and more deadly cruel; I
have my dark art
That fools call witchcraft. Not for nothing I have
worshipped the wild gray goddess that walks in
the dark, the wise one,
The terrible one, the sweet huntress, flower of night,
Hecate,
In my house at my hearth.

(She crosses up to pillar Right and sits.)

(LIGHT CUE #20)

THE NURSE. (*Hurries in toward MEDEA, to her Right*)

My lady: he was leaving Creon's
door: he is coming.

(MEDEA pays no attention.)

Ægeus is coming?

The power of Athens.

MEDEA. (*Prays*)

Ancient Goddess to whom I and my people
Make the sacrifice of black lambs and black female
hounds,

Holy one, haunter of cross-roads, queen of night,
Hecate,

Help me now: to remember in my mind the use of the
venomous fire, the magic song

And the sharp gems. (*LIGHT CUE #21*)

(*She sits in deep thought. ÆGEUS comes in up
Right.*)

THE NURSE.

He is here, my lady,
Athens is here.

(MEDEA pays no attention. THREE WOMEN
curtsy, then resume their original positions at
rock. FIRST WOMAN sits.)

ÆGEUS. (*Crosses down Left and up steps to top
step, Left of MEDEA*)

Medea, rejoice! There is no fairer
greeting from friend to friend.

(*She ignores him. He speaks more loudly*)

Hail and rejoice! Medea.

MEDEA. (*Lifts her head and stares at him*)

"Rejoice?" It may be so. It
may be I shall—rejoice
Before the sun sets.

ÆGEUS.

What has happened to you?

Your

eyes are cavernous!
And your mouth twitches.

MEDEA.

Nothing: I am quite well:
fools trouble me.—Where are you travelling from,
Ægeus?

ÆGEUS.

From Delphi, where I went to consult
The ancient oracle of Apollo.

MEDEA. (*Abstractedly*)

Oh— Delphi—

Did you get a good answer?

ÆGEUS.

An obscure one.

Some god or other has made me unable to beget a child:
that is my sorrow: but the oracle
Never gives plain responses.

(*Crosses two steps nearer her*)

I tell you these things
because you are skilled in mysteries, and you might
help me

To the god's meaning.

MEDEA. (*Wearily*)

You want a child? What did

Apollo

Say to you?

ÆGEUS.

That I must not unloose the hanging foot
of the wine-skin until I return
To the hearth of my fathers.

MEDEA. (*Without interest, but understanding the
anatomical reference*)

You have never had a
child?

ÆGEUS.

No.

And it is bitterness.

(*Turns away from her and takes one step
down.*)

MEDEA.

But when misfortune comes it is

bitter to have children, and watch their starlike
Faces grow dim to endure it.

ÆGEUS.

When death comes, Medea,
It is, for a childless man, utter despair, darkness, ex-
tinction. One's children
Are the life after death.

MEDEA. (*Excited*)

Do you feel it so? Do you feel
it so?
Then—if you had a dog-eyed enemy and needed
absolute vengeance—you'd kill
The man's children first. Unchild him, ha?
And then unlife him.

ÆGEUS.

I do not care to think of such
horrors.
I have no enemy.

(MEDEA rises, making violent movement; sits
again. He stares, and slightly recoils from
her. Crosses back up to her)

What is it? What is the matter,
Medea? You are trembling; wild fever
Flames in your eyes.

MEDEA.

I am well enough— Fools trouble
me, and dogs; but not that— Oh—
ÆGEUS.

What has hap-
pened to you?

THE NURSE. (*Crouches by her, trying to comfort
her*)

My dear—my love—

MEDEA. (*Pushes her gently aside; looks up at
ÆGEUS*)

I would not hurt my children.
Their father hurts them.

ÆGEUS.

What do you mean—Jason? What has Jason done?

MEDEA.

He has betrayed and denied
Both me and them.

ÆGEUS.

Jason has done that? Why? Why?

MEDEA.

He has cast me off and married Creon's young
daughter.
And Creon, this very day, is driving us
Into black exile.

ÆGEUS.

Jason consents to that?

MEDEA.

He is glad of it.

ÆGEUS. (*Crossing down steps to WOMEN down
Right*)

Why—it's atrocious, it's past belief.

THE NURSE. (*Says in MEDEA's ear*)
Ask him for refuge! Ask him to receive you in Athens!

MEDEA. (*Straight and rigid*)
Do you not think such men ought to be punished,
Ægeus?

ÆGEUS.

I think it is villainous.
They told me nothing of this—

MEDEA.

Do you not think such
men ought to be punished, Ægeus?

(*Crossing down steps to 2d step Center.*)

ÆGEUS.

Where will you go?

MEDEA. (*Solemnly*)

If there is any rightness on earth
or in heaven, they will be punished.

ÆGEUS.

Where

Will you go to, Medea?

MEDEA. (*Crossing Left, still on 2nd step*)

What? To death, of course.

THE NURSE. (*Crosses to ÆGEUS*)

Oh— She is all bewildered, sir,
In the deep storm and ocean of grief, or she would ask
of you
Refuge in Athens.

MEDEA. (*In bitter mockery, seeing ÆGEUS hesitate*)

Ah? So I should. That startled the

man.—Ægeus:

Will you shelter me in Athens?

ÆGEUS.

Why—yes. Yes—I will
not take you now from Corinth; it would not be
right.

I want no quarrel with Creon, I am his guest here.
(*Crossing below NURSE to Center*)

If you by your own means come to Athens
I will take care of you.

(THE NURSE sits on 1st step to Right of
ÆGEUS.)

MEDEA.

I could repay you for it. I know
the remedies—that would make a dry stick flame
into fire and fruit.

ÆGEUS. (*Eagerly*)

You'd cure my sterility?

MEDEA.

do so.

ÆGEUS.

You are famous for profound knowledge
Of drugs and charms.

(*Eagerly*)

You'll come to Athens?

MEDEA.

If I choose.

If the gods decide it so. But, Ægeus,
Would you protect me if I came? I have certain

enemies. If powerful enemies came, baying for my
blood,

Would you protect me?

ÆGEUS.

Why—yes. What enemies?—

Yes.

Athens protects.

MEDEA.

I should need peace and a free mind
While I prepared the medicines to make you well.

ÆGEUS.

You'll have them, you'll have them, Medea. You've
seen the huge stones
In the old sacred war-belt of Athens. Come the four
ends of the world, they will not break in: you're
safe there:

I am your pledge.

(*Extends arm, which she later takes.*)

MEDEA.

Will you swear it, Ægeus?

ÆGEUS.

Ah? Why?

I promised.

MEDEA. (*She takes his arm*)

I trust you: the oath is formal: your
cure

Depends on it.

(*She crosses below him to down Right and
then turns to him, raising her hand*)

You swear by the fruitful earth and
high shining heaven that you will protect me in
Athens

Against all men. Swear it.

ÆGEUS. (*Raises his hand*)

I swear by the fruitful earth
and high shining heaven to protect you in Athens
Against all men.

(BOTH lower their arms.)

MEDEA.

And if you should break this oath?

ÆGEUS.

I will not break it.

MEDEA.

If you should break it, the earth
Will give you no bread but death, and the sky no light
But darkness.

ÆGEUS. (*Visibly perturbed*)

I will not break it.

MEDEA.

You must repeat the

words, Ægeus.

ÆGEUS.

If I break it, the earth

Will give me no bread but death, and the sky no light
But darkness. (THUNDER)

MEDEA.

You have sworn: the gods have heard

you.

(*Crosses below ÆGEUS to Center. Pause.*)

ÆGEUS. (*Uneasily*)

When will you come to Athens?

(*Turning to her.*)

MEDEA.

To Athens?

Oh,

To Athens. Why:—if I come, if I live—it will be soon.

The yoke's

On the necks of the horses.

(*Crosses up to top step at door of house*)

—I have some things to do

That men will talk of afterwards with hushed voices:
while I and my children

Safe in Athens laugh. Is that it? Farewell, Ægeus.
(*She turns abruptly from him; goes slowly,
deep in thought, into the house. The doors
close.*)

ÆGEUS. (*Staring after her*)

May the gods comfort you, Medea.—to you also
farewell,

Women of Corinth.

(THREE WOMEN rise.)

FIRST WOMAN.

Fair be the gale behind you, sir,
and the way ahead.

(*Exit ÆGEUS up Right. She turns to NURSE*)

What is she plotting in her deep mind?

She is juggling with death and life, as a juggler
With a black ball and a white ball.

(*NURSE slowly goes up to 2nd step, looking at
door of house.*)

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses to Left of the FIRST
WOMAN*)

No: she is like some distracted city

Sharpening its weapons. Embassies visit her:

The heads of state come to her door:

She receives them darkly.

THE NURSE.

I beseech you, women,

Not to speak words against my lady whom I love. You
know that wicked injustice she has to suffer.

(*She prays*)

O God, protector of exiles, lord of the holy sky, lead us
To the high rock that Athens loves, and the olive
Garland of Athens.

(*THE NURSE crosses down Left and sits on
steps.*)

FIRST WOMAN.

Athens is beautiful

As a lamp on a rock.

The temples are marble-shafted; light shines and
lingers there.

Honey-color among the carved stones

And silver-color on the leaves of the olives.
The maidens are crowned with violets: Athens and
Corinth

Are the two crowns of time.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses to FIRST WOMAN and they join hands*)

Mycenae for spears and armor; Sparta
For the stern men and the tall blonde women; and
Thebes I remember,

Old Thebes and the seven gates in the gray walls—
But rather I praise Athena, the ivory, the golden,
The gray-eyed Virgin, her city.
And also I praise Corinth of the beautiful fountains,
On the fair plain between the two gulfs.

FIRST WOMAN.
God-favored cities of the Greek world.
Fortunate those that dwell in them, happy that behold
them.

SECOND WOMAN.
How can one wish to die? How can that woman
Be drowned in sorrow and bewildered with hatred?
(*LIGHT CUE #24*)

(*The BOLT on door is heard opening.*)

MEDEA enters and stands in doorway.)

For only to be alive and to see the light
Is beautiful. Only to see the light;
To see a blade of young grass,
Or the gray face of a stone.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Pointing toward MEDEA*)
Hush.

MEDEA. (*Proudly and falsely*)

As you say. What a marvelous privilege it is
Merely to be alive. And how foolish it would be
To spend the one day of life that remains to me—at
least in Corinth—this tag end of one day
On tears and hatred! Rather I should rejoice, and
sing, and offer gifts; and as to my enemies—
I will be reconciled with them.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Amazed*)

Reconciled with them!

(*THREE WOMEN cross a few steps to MEDEA.*)

MEDEA.

As you say. Reconciled. Why should they hate me?
Surely I can appease those people.
They say that gold will buy anything; even friendship,
even love: at least in Greece,
Among you civilized people, you reasonable and civil-
ized Hellenes.—In fact,
We've seen it happen. They bought Jason; Jason's
love. Well—

I shall buy theirs.

I still have two or three of the treasures that I brought
from home, things of pure precious gold, which
a god (*LIGHT CUE #25*)

Gave to the kings of my ancestors.

(*The LIGHT darkens, a cloud passing over
the sun. HARP effect offstage. The THREE
WOMEN huddle together.*)

Is it late? It seems
to me (*WARN Curtain.*)

That the light darkens.

(*To THE NURSE*)

Is it evening?

THE NURSE. (*Trembling*)

No—No—A cloud.

MEDEA.

I hope for thunder: let the sky rage: my gifts
(*Enter TWO SLAVES from door with gift.
Kneel on top step.*)

Will shine the brighter.—Listen, old woman! I want
you

(*THE NURSE rises.*)

To go to Jason and tell him—tell him— Tell him that
I am sick of hating and weary of evil!

I wish for peace.

(*MEDEA crosses and stands between Two
SLAVES*)

I wish to send precious gifts to that pale girl with the
yellow hair

Whom he has married: tell him to come and take them
—and to kiss his boys

Before we go into exile. Tell him to come speedily. Now
run, run, find him.

(MEDEA turns her head away.)

THE NURSE. (Crossing to WOMEN stage Center)
Oh, I'll go. I'll run.

(Tremulously, to WOMEN)

Let me pass, please.

(WOMEN make way for THE NURSE. MEDEA
stands looking after her. THE NURSE turns
back at the limit of the scene, Right, and says,
wringing her hands)

But I am terrified. I do not know— I am terrified.

(START SLOW CURTAIN)

Pray to the gods, women, to keep
Evil birds from our hearts!

(She hurries away up Right.)

MEDEA. (Crossing down two steps)

Run! Run! Find him!!!!

(MEDEA goes into the house.)

CURTAIN

(HOUSE LIGHTS UP.)

ACT TWO

HOUSE LIGHTS UP

LIGHT CUE #1 UP

MUSIC

CURTAIN

LIGHT CUE #1 DOWN

SCRIM IN FRONT OF SCENE

REST OF LIGHT CUE #1

SPEARS, WITH SNAKES COILED AROUND
THEM, AT THE FOOT OF COLUMNS

MEDEA is sitting on the upper doorstep. A cloak of
woven gold lies across her knee and down the stone
steps. Beside her are two open cases of dark
leather. From one she takes a coronet of gold vine
leaves, looks at it and replaces it.

TWO SERVING WOMEN stand in the doorway be-
hind her. On the Right, at some distance, the
THREE WOMEN are huddled, like sheep in a storm.

The Scene is darker than it was, and the gold
cloth shines.

MEDEA.

These are the gifts I am sending to the young bride;
this golden wreath

And this woven-gold veil. They are not without value;
there is nothing like them in the whole world, or
at least

The Western world; the God of the Sun gave them to
my father's father, and I have kept them

(END MUSIC)

In the deep chest for some high occasion; which has
now come.

I have great joy in giving these jewels to Creon's
daughter, for the glory of life consists of being
generous

To one's friends, and—merciless to one's enemies—you know what a friend she has been to me. All Corinth knows.

The slaves talk of it. The old stones in the walls Have watched and laughed.

(*LIGHT CUE #2*)

(*MEDEA looks at the gold cloth, and strokes it cautiously with her hand. It seems to scorch her fingers. THIRD WOMAN has come nearer to look; now starts backward.*)

MEDEA.

See, it is almost alive. Gold is a living thing: such pure gold.

(*NURSE enters from up Right; crosses to foot of steps*)

But when her body has warmed it, how it will shine! (*To the NURSE*)

Why doesn't he come? What keeps him?

NURSE. (*Evidently terrified*)

Oh, my lady: presently.

I have but now returned from him. He was beyond the gate, watching the races—where a monstrous thing

Had happened: a young mare broke from the chariot And tore with her teeth a stallion.

MEDEA. (*Stands up, shakes out the golden cloak, which again smoulders. She folds it cautiously, lays it in the leather case. The LIGHT has darkened again. She looks anxiously at the clouded sun*)

He takes his time, eh? It

is intolerable

To sit and wait.

(*To the SERVING WOMEN*)

Take these into the house. Keep them at hand For when I call.

(*They take them in. MEDEA moves restlessly, under extreme nervous tension; speaks to the NURSE.*)

NURSE *crosses below steps to stage Left, then up two steps*)

You say that a mare attacked a stallion?

THE NURSE.

She tore

him cruelly.

I saw him being led away: a black racer: his blood ran down

From the throat to the fetlocks.

MEDEA.

You're sure he's coming. You're

sure?

THE NURSE.

He said he would.

MEDEA.

Let him make haste, then!

SECOND WOMAN. (*She crosses to Left below NURSE*)
Frightening irrational things

Have happened lately; the face of nature is flawed with omens.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Crosses to Left, joining SECOND WOMAN*)

Yesterday evening a slave

Came up to the harbor-gate, carrying a basket

Of new-caught fish: one of the fish took fire

And burned in the wet basket with a high flame: the thing was witnessed

By many persons.

THIRD WOMAN. (*Crosses Left of other Two WOMEN, joining them*)

And a black leopard was seen

Gliding through the market-place—

MEDEA. (*Abruptly, approaching the WOMEN*)

You haven't told

me yet: do you not think that Creon's daughter Will be glad of those gifts?

FIRST WOMAN.

O Medea, too much wealth

Is sometimes dreadful.

MEDEA.

She'll be glad, however. She'll take them and put them on, she'll wear them, she'll strut in them, She'll peacock in them.—I see him coming now.—the
(THREE WOMEN retire to up Left corner. NURSE sits below Left pillar)
whole palace will admire her.—Stand away from me, women,
While I make my sick peace.

(MEDEA crosses way down Right as JASON enters up Right to stage Center. NURSE points at MEDEA. who goes across the scene to meet JASON, but more and more slowly, and stops. Her attitude indicates her aversion.)

JASON.

Well, I have come. I tell you plainly, Not for your sake: the children's. Your woman says that you have your wits again, and are willing To look beyond your own woes.

(MEDEA is silent. JASON observes her and says)
It appears doubtful.

(She turns from him)

—Where are the children? I have made inquiry: I can find fosterage for them In Epidaurus; or any other of several cities That are Creon's friends. I'll visit them from time to time, and watch That they're well kept.

MEDEA. (With suppressed violence)

You mean—take them from me!
Be careful, Jason, I am not patient yet.
(More quietly)

I am the one who labored in pain to bear them, I cannot Smile while I lose them. But I am learning: I am learning.—
No, Jason: I will not give up my little ones

To the cold care of strangers.

Hard faces, harsh hands. It will be far better for them to share My wandering ocean of beggary and bleak exile: I love them, Jason. Only if you would keep them and care for them here in Corinth, I might consent.

JASON.

Gladly—but they are exiled.

MEDEA.

—In your own

house.

JASON.

Gladly I'd do it—but you understand They are exiled, as you are. I asked Creon and he refused it.

MEDEA.

You asked Creon to take my children from me?
(She reaches her hands toward him)
Forgive me, Jason,
As I do you.

(Crosses up steps to his Right)

We have had too much wrath, and our acts Are closing on us. On me, I mean. Retribution is from the gods, and it breaks our hearts: but you Feel no guilt, you fear nothing, nothing can touch you. It is wonderful to stand serene above fate While earthlings wince. If it lasts. It does not always last.

—Do you love the children, Jason?

JASON.

Ha? Certainly. The children? Certainly! I am their father.

MEDEA.

Oh, but that's not enough. If I am to give them up to you—be patient with me, I must question you first. And very deeply; to the quick. If anything happens to them, Would you be grieved?

JASON.

Nothing will happen to them,
Medea, if in my care. Rest your mind on it.

MEDEA. (*She crosses up to top step in back of JASON*)

You must pardon me: it is not possible to be certain
of that.

If they were—killed and their blood
Ran on the floor of the house or down the deep earth—
Would you be grieved?

JASON.

You have a sick mind. What
a weak thing a woman is, always dreaming of evil.

MEDEA.

Answer me!

JASON.

Yes, after I'd cut their killer into red col-
lops—I'd grieve.

MEDEA.

That is true: vengeance
Makes grief bearable.—But—Creon's daughter, your
wife—no doubt will breed
Many other boys.—But, if something should happen
to—Creon's daughter—

JASON.

Enough, Medea. Too much. Be silent!

MEDEA.

I am to conclude that you love—Creon's daughter—
More than your sons. They'll have to take the sad
journey with me.

(*To the NURSE*)

Tell the boys to come out
And bid their father farewell.

(*The NURSE goes into the house.*)

JASON. (*Coming to her and taking her arm*)

I could take them from you

By force, Medea.

MEDEA. (*Violently*)

Try it, you!

(*Controlling herself*)

No, Creon decided otherwise; he said

(*JASON crosses down Right as if to go*)

they will share my exile.—Come, Jason,

Let's be friends at last!

(*The BOYS come out with their TUTOR, followed
by the NURSE. JASON makes to clasp her arm. She
pulls away to Center*)

I am quite patient now; I have learned.—Come, boys:
come,

(*BOYS run straight to MEDEA.*)

Speak to your father.

(*NURSE and TUTOR remain on top step at
either side of door. They shrink back*)

No, no, we're friends again. We're not
angry any more.

JASON. (*Has gone eagerly to meet them on the steps.
He drops to one knee to be more nearly level with them,
but they are shy and reluctant*)

Big boys. Tall fellows, ha?

You've grown up since I saw you.

MEDEA.

Smile for him, children.

Give him

(*She turns, and stands rigidly turned away,
her face sharp with pain*)
your hands.

THE NURSE. (*To JASON*)

I think he's afraid of you, sir.

JASON. (*To the YOUNGER BOY*)

What?

What? You'll learn, my man,

(*During this speech ELDER BOY crosses to
him. He picks him up*)

Not to fear me. You'll make your enemies run away
from you

When you grow up.

(*To the ELDER BOY*)

And you, Captain,

How would you like a horn-tipped bow to hunt rabbits with?

Wolves, I mean.

(Takes ELDER BOY by the hand and crosses with him to rock Right. He sits YOUNGER BOY on his lap. ELDER BOY sits on floor. He plays with the BOYS. They are less shy of him now.)

FIRST WOMAN. *(Coming close to MEDEA)*

Don't give them to him,

Medea. If you do it will ache forever.

SECOND WOMAN.

You have refuge;

take them there.

Athens is beautiful—

MEDEA. *(Fiercely)*

Be silent!

Look at him: he loves them—ah? Therefore his dear children

Are not going to that city but a darker city, where no games are played, no music is heard.—Do you think

I am a cow lowing after the calf? Or a bitch with pups licking

The hand that struck her? Watch and see. Watch this man, women: he is going to weep. I think

He is going to weep blood, and quite soon, and much more Than I have wept. Watch and keep silence.

(She goes toward the GROUP on the steps)

Jason,

Are the boys dear to you? I think I am satisfied that you love them,

These two young heroes.

(JASON stands up and turns to her, one of the BOYS clinging to each of his hands. He has made friends with them.)

MEDEA. *(She weeps)*

Oh—Oh—Oh!

JASON.

—God's hand, Medea, what is it?

What is the matter?

MEDEA. *(Makes with both hands a gesture of pushing down something, flings her head back proudly)*

Nothing. It is hard to let them go.

—This I have thought of:

You shall take them to—Creon's daughter, your wife—and make them kneel to her, and ask her

To ask her father to let them stay here in Corinth. He'll grant it, he is growing old, he denies her nothing.

Even that hard king loves his only child.

What she asks is done.—You will go with the boys, Jason, and speak for them,—they are not skillful yet

In supplication—and I'll send gifts. I'll put gifts in their hands. People say that gifts

Will persuade even the gods.—Is it well thought of?

Will she listen to us?

JASON.

Why, if I ask it! She'd hardly refuse me anything. And I believe that you're right,

She can rule Creon.

MEDEA. *(To the TUTOR)*

Bring me those gold things.

(TUTOR exits main door.)

(She extends hands to BOYS. Sits on step.)

(They cross to her)

Dear ones, brave little falcons—little pawns of my agony—

Go, ask that proud breastless girl of her bitter charity Whether she will let you nest here until your wings

fledge, while far your mother

Flies the dark storm—

(She weeps again.)

JASON.

I'm sorry for you. Parting is hard.

(He crosses down Right off steps.)

MEDEA.

I can

bear it.

And worse too.

(The TUTOR and SERVING WOMEN bring the gifts)

Oh, here: here are the things: take them, darlings,
Into your little hands.

(Giving them to the BOYS. CROWN goes to YOUNGER BOY. CLOAK to ELDER BOY. Each show them to TUTOR and NURSE, then sit on the 3rd step. SERVING WOMEN exit as soon as gifts are taken from them)

Hold carefully by the cases: don't touch the gold,
Or it might—tarnish.

JASON.

Why! These are king's treasures. You shouldn't,
Medea: it's too much. Creon's house
Has gold enough of its own.

MEDEA.

Oh—if she'll wear them. What should I
want with woven gold vanities—Black is my
wear. The woman ought to be very happy

(Throws wedding ring in box with cloak)

With such jewels—and such a husband—ah? Her sun
is rising,

(MEDEA crosses Left)

mine going down—I hope
To a red sunset.—The little gold wreath is pretty, isn't
it?

(YOUNGER BOY holds it up to JASON.)

JASON. *(Doubtfully)*

It looks like fire—

MEDEA.

Vine leaves: the flashing
Arrow-sharp leaves. They have weight, though.

(Boys put down boxes)

Gold is too heavy a burden
for little hands. Carry them, you,

Until you come to the palace.

(NURSE takes gold wreath; exits up Right, followed by TUTOR with cloak. JASON follows with BOYS by the hand)

—Farewell, sweet boys: brave
little trudging pilgrims from the black wave
To the white desert: take the stuff in, be sure you lay
(LIGHT CUE #4)

it in her own hands.

Come back and tell me what happens.

(Crosses up to front of pillar Right and waves goodbye to them as they leave. She turns abruptly away from them)

Tell me what happens.

(The BOYS go out reluctantly, JASON holding their hands.)

Rejoice, women,

The gifts are given; the bait is laid.

The gods roll their great eyes over Creon's house and
quietly smile;

That robe of bright-flowing gold, that bride-veil, that
fish-net

To catch a young slender salmon—not mute, she'll sing:
her delicate body writhes in the meshes,

The golden wreath binds her bright head with light:
she'll dance, she'll sing loudly:

Would I were there to hear it, that proud one howling.

(She crosses to Center between pillars)

—Look, the sun's out again, the clouds are gone,
All's gay and clear. Ai! I wish the deep earth would
open and swallow us—

Before I do what comes next.

I wish all life would perish,

(Crosses down to 3rd step and sits)

and the holy gods in high heaven die,

before my little ones

Come home to my hands.

FIRST WOMAN. *(Going to MEDEA)*

It would be better for you, Medea, if the earth
Opened her jaws and took you down into darkness.

But one thing you will not do, for you cannot,
 You will not hurt your own children, though wrath
 like plague-boils
 Aches, your mind in a fire-haze
 Bites the purple apples of pain—no blood-lapping
 Beast of the field, she-bear nor lioness,
 Nor the lean wolf-bitch,
 Hurts her own tender whelps, nor the yellow-eyed,
 Scythe-beaked and storm-shouldered
 Eagle that tears the lambs has ever made prey
 Of the fruit of her own tree—

MEDEA.

How could that girl's death slake me?

THIRD WOMAN. (*Coming forward from the OTHERS*)
 I am sick with terror.

I'll run to the palace, I'll warn them.

MEDEA.

Will you?—Go. Go if you will.
 God and my vengeful goddess are doing these things:
 you cannot prevent them, but you could easily fall
 In the same fire.

THIRD WOMAN. (*Retreating*)

I am afraid to go.

MEDEA.

You are wise. Anyone
 Running between me and my justice will reap
 What no man wants.

FIRST WOMAN.

Not justice; vengeance.
 You have suffered evil, you wish to inflict evil.

MEDEA.

I do according to nature what I have to do.

FIRST WOMAN.

I have heard evil
 Answering evil as thunder answers the lightning.
 A great waste voice in the hollow sky,
 And all that they say is death. I have heard vengeance
 Like an echo under a hill answering vengeance,
 Great hollow voices: all that they say is death.

SECOND WOMAN.

The sword speaks
 And the spear answers: the city is desolate.
 The nations remember old wrongs and destroy each
 other.
 And no man binds up their wounds.

FIRST WOMAN.

But justice

Builds a firm house.

MEDEA.

The doors of her house are vengeance.

SECOND WOMAN.

I dreamed that someone
 Gave good for evil, and the world was amazed.

MEDEA. (*Rises. Crosses up between pillar and column Right*)

Only a coward or a madman gives good for evil.—Did
 you hear a thin music

Like a girl screaming? Or did I perhaps imagine it?
 Hark, it is music.

(*LIGHT CUE #5*)

THIRD WOMAN. (*Crossing towards Center below steps*)

Let me go, Medea!

I'll be mute, I'll speak to no one. I cannot bear—

Let me go to my house!

MEDEA.

You will stay here,

And watch the end.

(*The WOMEN are beginning to mill like scared cattle, huddled and circular*)

You will be quiet, you women. You
 came to see

(*Offstage HARP EFFECT*)

How the barbarian woman endures betrayal: watch
 and you'll know.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Kneels*)

My heart is a shaken cup
 Of terror: the thin black wine
 Spills over all my flesh down to my feet.

FIRST WOMAN.

She fled from her father's house in a storm of blood,
In a blood-storm she flew up from Thessaly,
Now here and dark over Corinth she widens
Wings to ride up the twisted whirlwind
And talons to hold with—
Let me flee this dark place and the pillared doorway.

SECOND WOMAN.

I hear the man-wolf on the snow hill
Howl to the soaring moon—

THIRD WOMAN.

The demon comes in through the locked door
And strangles the child—

SECOND WOMAN.

Blood is the seed of blood, hundredfold the harvest,
The gleaners that follow it, their feet are crimson—

FIRST WOMAN.

I see the whirlwind hanging from the black sky.
Like a twisted rope,
Like an erect serpent, its tail tears the earth,
It is braided of dust and lightning,
Who will fly in it? Let me hide myself
From these night-shoring pillars and the dark door.

(LIGHT CUE #6)

MEDEA.

Have patience,

women. Be quiet.

I am quite sure something has happened; presently
someone

Will bring us news.

THIRD WOMAN.

Look! The children are coming.

SECOND WOMAN. (Rises)

They have bright things in their hands: their faces are
clear and joyous; was all that fear
A dream, a dream?

(MEDEA crosses to pillar Left. The TUTOR
enters up Right with the BOYS. The ELDER
Boy carries a decorated bow and arrows;

the YOUNGER BOY has a doll, a brightly
painted wooden warrior. MEDEA, gazing at
the BOYS, retreats slowly backward from
them.)

THE TUTOR. (Crossing up to MEDEA on top step;
BOYS stand behind him on 2nd and 3rd steps)

Rejoice, Medea, I bring good news. The
princess graciously
Received your presents and smiled: it is peace between
you. She has welcomed the little boys, they are
safe from exile.

They'll be kept here. Their father is joyful.

MEDEA. (Coldly, her hands clenched in the effort of
self control)

Yes?

THE TUTOR.

All Creon's house is well pleased. When we first went in
The serving-women came and fondled the children;
it was rumored through all the household that
you and Jason

Were at peace again: like word of a victory
Running through a wide city, when people gather in
the streets to be glad together: and we brought
the boys

Into the hall; we put those costly gifts in their hands;
then Jason

Led them before the Princess. At first she looked
angrily at them and turned away, but Jason said,
"Don't be angry at your friends. You ought to love
Those whom I love. Look what they've brought you,
dear," and she looked and saw

In the dark boxes the brilliant gold: she smiled then,
And marveled at it.

(He turns to them and YOUNGER BOY crosses
up to him)

Afterwards she caressed the children;
she even said that this little one's
Hair was like fine-spun gold. Then Jason gave them
these toys and we came away.

MEDEA.

Yes.—If this

Were all. If this were all, old man—
I'd have your bony loins beaten to a blood-froth
For the good news you bring.

TUTOR.

My lady—!

MEDEA.

There's more, however.

It will come soon.

*(The Boys shyly approach her and show their
toys. She, with violent self-constraint, looks
at them; but folds her hands in her cloak, not
to touch them.)*

ELDER BOY. *(Crosses to her. Drawing the little bow)*
Look, Mother.

MEDEA. *(Suddenly weeping)*

Take them away from me!

I cannot bear. I cannot bear.

(LIGHT CUE #7)

THE TUTOR.

Children, come quickly.

*(He shepherds them up the steps, and disap-
pears in the house.)*

FIRST WOMAN.

If there is any mercy or forbearance in heaven
Let it reach down and touch that dark mind
To save it from what it dreams—

THE SLAVE. *(A young SLAVE dashes in up Right,
panting and distraught. He has run from CREON's
house)*

Where is Medea?

*(SLAVE crosses to base of steps Right, throw-
ing himself across them.)*

SECOND WOMAN.

What has happened? What horror drives
you?

Are spears hunting behind you?

THE SLAVE. *(He sees MEDEA on the steps)*

Flee for your life, Medea! I am

Jason's man, but you were good to me
While I was here in the house. Can you hear me?
Escape, Medea!

MEDEA.

I hear you.

Draw breath; say quietly
What you have seen. It must have been something
notable, the way your eyes
Bulge in the whites.

THE SLAVE.

If you have horses, Medea, drive! Or
a boat on the shore,
Sail!

(Rises and crosses down stage Right.)

MEDEA.

But first you must tell me about the beautiful
girl who was lately married:

SLAVE.

Ooh!

MEDEA.

your great man's daughter:

SLAVE.

Ooh!

MEDEA.

Are they all quite well?

SLAVE.

My ears ring with the crying,
my eyes are scalded. She put on the gold gar-
ments—

Did you do it, Medea?

MEDEA.

I did it.

SLAVE.

Ooooh!!!

MEDEA.

Speak quietly.

THE SLAVE.

You are avenged.

You are horribly avenged. It is too much.
The gods will hate you.

(Collapses on podium.)

MEDEA. *(Avid, but still sitting)*

That is my care. Did anyone die with her?

THE SLAVE.

Creon!

THREE WOMEN.

Oooh!!!!

MEDEA. *(Solemnly)*

Where is pride now?

Tell me all that you saw. Speak slowly.

THE SLAVE.

He tried to save her—

(TRUMPETS off stage Right. SLAVE rises)

he died! Corinth is masterless.

All's in amazed confusion, and some are looting, but
they'll avenge him—

(He hears someone coming behind him)

I'm going on!

Someone is going to die.

(LIGHT CUE #8)

*(He runs Left to the far side of the scene,
and exits while MEDEA speaks. Meanwhile the
light has been changing, and soon the sun will
set.)*

MEDEA.

Here comes a more stable witness.

(The NURSE enters from up Right)

Old friend:

Catch your breath; take your time. I want the whole
tale, every gesture and cry. I have labored for this.

THE NURSE.

Death is turned loose! I've hobbled and run, and
fallen—

(Crosses to 4th step and sits.)

MEDEA.

Please.

Nurse: I am very happy: go slowly.

*(MEDEA sits and puts her head in NURSE's
lap)*

Tell me these things in order from the beginning.

As when you used to dress me, when I was little, in my
father's house: you used to say

"One thing at a time; one thing and then the next."

(The LIGHT has changed to a flare of sunset)

*(THREE WOMEN have assembled themselves
after NURSE's entrance in following fashion:*

*FIRST sitting first step Center, SECOND stand-
ing to her Left, THIRD standing to Left of
SECOND.)*

THE NURSE.

My eyes are blistered,

My throat's like a dry straw— There was a long mirror
on the wall, and when her eyes saw it—

After the children had gone with Jason—she put her
hands in the case and took those gold things—and I

Watched, for I feared something might happen to her,
but I never thought

So horribly—she placed on her little head the bright
golden wreath, she gathered the flowing gold robe

Around her white shoulders,

And slender flanks,—

*(MEDEA rises; crosses to below rock down
Right)*

And gazed at the girl in the metal mirror, going back
and forth

On tiptoe almost;

But suddenly horror began. I— Oh, oh—

MEDEA. *(Crosses up to Right of NURSE, shaking her
by the shoulders)*

You are not suffering.

You saw it, you did not feel it. Speak plainly.

THE NURSE.

Her face went white;

She staggered a few steps, bending over, and fell

Into the great throne-chair; then a serving woman
Began to call for water thinking she had fainted, but
saw the foam

Start on her lips, and the eyes rolling, and screamed
instead. Then some of them

Ran after Jason, others ran to fetch Creon: and that
doomed girl

Frightfully crying started up from the chair; she ran,
she was like a torch, and the gold crown

(MEDEA races up to door of house writhing)

Like a comet streamed fire; she tore at it but it clung
to her head; the golden cloak

Was white-hot, flaying the flesh from the living bones:
blood mixed with fire ran down, she fell, she
burned

On the floor, writhing. Then Creon came and flung
himself on her, hoping to choke

That rage of flame, but it ran through him, his own
agony

Made him forget his daughter's. The fire stuck to the
flesh, it glued him to her; he tried to stand up,
He tore her body and his own. The burnt flesh broke
In lumps from the bones.

(She covers her eyes with her hands)

I have finished. They lie there.

Eyeless, disfigured, untouchable; middens of smoking
flesh—

(Nearly a scream)

No!

I have no more.

MEDEA. *(Crossing down to NURSE; takes her arms)*

I want all.

Had they died when you came away?

THE NURSE.

I am not able—have mercy—

No, the breath

Still whistled in the black mouths. No one could touch
them.

Jason stood in their smoke, and his hands tore
His unhelmeted hair.

(LIGHT CUE #9)

MEDEA.

You have told good news well: I'll reward you.
As for those people, they will soon die. Their woes are
over too soon.

*(MEDEA crosses down, then paces up Right
and back down Right; sees WOMEN at end of
speech and crosses to them)*

Mine are not.

Jason's are not.

*(She turns abruptly from them, toward the
Boys, who have been standing by the doorway,
fascinated, not comprehending but watching)*

My little falcons!—Listen to me! Laugh and
be glad: we have accomplished it.

Our enemies were great and powerful, they were full
of cold pride, they ruled all this country—they are
down in the ashes.

(Sitting on steps with Boys)

Crying like dogs, cowering in the ashes, in their own
ashes. They went down with the sun, and the sun
will rise

And not see them again. He will think "Perhaps they
are sleeping, they feasted late.

At noon they will walk in the garden." Oh, no, oh, no!
They will not walk in the garden. No one has ever
injured me but suffered more

Than I had suffered.

(She turns from the Boys)

Therefore this final sacrifice I

intended glares in my eyes

Like a lion on a ridge.

(Turning back to the Boys)

We still hate, you know;—a person
nearer than these, more vile, more contemptible,
Whom I—I cannot. If he were my own hands I would
cut him off, or my eyes, I would gouge him out—
But not you: that was madness.

(She turns from them)

So Jason will be able to
say, "I have lost much,
But not all: I have children: My sons are well."
(*She stands staring, agonized, one hand pick-
ing at the other*)

No! I want him crushed, boneless, crawling—
I have no choice.

(*Resolutely, to the THREE WOMEN. She rises
and crosses down Left to WOMEN*)

(*LIGHT CUE #10*)

You there! You thought me soft and
submissive like a common woman—who takes a
blow

And cries a little, and she wipes her face
And runs about the housework, loving her master? I
am not such a woman.

FIRST WOMAN.

Awake, Medea!

Awake from the evil dream. Catch up your children and
flee,

Farther than Athens, farther than Thrace or Spain,
flee to the world's end.

Fire and death have done your bidding,
Are you not fed full with evil?

Is it not enough?

MEDEA.

No, Loathing is endless.
Hate is a bottomless cup, I will pour and pour.

(*She turns fiercely to the Boys*)

Children—
(*Suddenly melting*)

—O my

little ones!

What was I dreaming?—My babes, my own!

(*She kneels to them, taking their hands*)

Never, never, never, never
Shall my own babes be hurt. Not if every war-hound
and spear-slave in headless Corinth
Were on the track.

(*Still kneeling; to WOMEN*)

Look, their sweet lips are trembling:
look, women, the little mouths: I frightened them
With those wild words: they stood and faced me, they
never flinched.

Look at their proud young eyes! My eaglets, my golden
ones!

(*She kisses them, then holds them off and
gazes at them*)

O sweet small faces—like the pale wild-roses
That blossom where the cliff breaks toward the brilliant
sea: the delicate form and color, the dear, dear
fragrance

Of your sweet breath—

(*She continues gazing at them; her face
changes*)

(*TRUMPETS off Right.*) ★

THE NURSE. (*Sits up*)

My lady, make haste, haste!

Take them and flee. Flee away from here! Someone
will come soon.

(*MEDEA still gazes at the Boys*)

Oh—listen to me.

Spears will come, death will come. All Corinth is in
confusion and headless anarchy, unkinged and
amazed

Around that horror you made: therefore they linger:
yet in a moment

Its avengers come!

(*MEDEA looks up from staring at the Boys.
Her face has changed; the love has gone out
of it. She speaks in a colorless, tired voice*)

MEDEA.

I have a sword in the house.

I can defend you.

(*She stands up stiffly and takes the Boys by
their shoulders; holds the ELDER in front of
her, toward WOMEN: speaks with cold in-
tensity*)

Would you say that this child

(*LIGHT CUE #11*)

Has Jason's eyes?

(The WOMEN are silent, in terror gazing at her)

—They are his cubs. They have his blood.

As long as they live I shall be mixed with him.

(Crosses to pillar up Right. She looks down at the Boys; speaks tenderly but hopelessly.)

Children:

It is evening. See, evening has come. Come, little ones. Into the house.

(Boys cross to her; arms about her waist)

Evening brings all things home. It brings the bird to the bough and the lamb to the fold—
And the child to the mother.

(She pushes Boys gently into house)

We must not think too much:

people go mad

If they think too much.

(LIGHT CUE #12)

(In the doorway, behind Boys, she flings up her hands as if to tear her hair out by the roots; then quietly goes in. The great door closes; the iron noise of the BOLT is driven home.)

THE NURSE.

No!

(She rushes toward the door, helpless, her hand reaching up and beating feebly against the foot of the door.)

FIRST WOMAN.

What is going to happen?

SECOND WOMAN.

That crown of horrors—

(They speak like somnambulists, and stand frozen. There is a moment of silence.)

CHILD'S VOICE. *(In the house, shrill, broken off)*
Mother Ai—!

(The WOMEN press toward the door, crying more or less simultaneously)

THE WOMEN.

Medea, no!

Prevent her! Save them!

Open the door—

(They listen for an answer.)

THIRD WOMAN.

A god is here, Medea, he calls to you, he forbids you—

(NURSE has risen, and beats feebly on the door, stooping and bent over. FIRST WOMAN stands beside her, very erect, with her back against the door, covering her ears with her hands. They are silent.)

ELDER BOY'S VOICE. *(Clear, but as if hypnotized)*
Mother— Mother—ai!

MEDEA. Aaahh!!!!

(Lamentation—keening—is heard in the house. It rises and falls, and continues to the end, but often nearly inaudible. It is now twilight.)

THE NURSE. *(Limps down the steps and says)*
There is no hope in heaven or earth. It is done.
It was destined when she was born, now it is done.
(Wailing.)

(LIGHT CUE #13)
(TRUMPETS off Right)
Oh, oh, oh.

THIRD WOMAN. *(With terror, looking into the shadows)*

Who is coming?

Someone is running at us!

FIRST WOMAN. *(Quietly)*

The accursed man.

Jason.

SECOND WOMAN.

He has a sword.

FIRST WOMAN.

I am more afraid of the clinging contagion
of his misfortunes.
A man the gods are destroying.

JASON. (*Enters rapidly up Right, disheveled and shaking, a drawn sword in his hand. Crosses in to Right at foot of steps*)

Where is that murderess? Here in
the house?
Or has she fled? She'll have to hide in the heavy metal
darkness and caves of the earth—and there
I'll crawl and find her.

(*No answer. The THREE WOMEN draw away from him as he moves toward the door. He stops and turns on them, drawing his left hand across his face, as if his eyes were bewildered.*)

JASON.

Are you struck dumb? Are you shielding her?
Where is Medea?

FIRST WOMAN.

You caused these things. She was faithful
to you and you broke faith.
Horror is here.

JASON.

Uncaused. There was no reason— Tell me at
once—
Whether she took my boys with her? Creon's people
would kill them for what she has done: I'd rather
save them

Than punish her. Help me in this.

THE NURSE. (*Wailing, sinks to ground down Left*)
Oh, oh, oh—

JASON. (*Looking sharply at NURSE*)

So she has killed herself.
Good. She never lacked courage— I'll take my sons
away to the far end of the earth, and never
Speak of these things again.

THE NURSE. (*Wailing*)

Oh, oh, oh—

(*Lamentation from the house answers.*)

JASON. (*With a queer slyness, for he is trying to cheat himself out of believing what he dreads. He glances at the door, furtively, over his shoulder*)

Is she lying in there?
Honorable at least in her death.—I might have known
it.

(*They remain silent*)

Well, answer!

FIRST WOMAN. (*Pointing toward CREON'S house*)

Death is there; death is here.

But you are both blind and deaf: how can I tell you?

JASON. (*Is silent, then says slowly*)

But—the—

children are well?

FIRST WOMAN.

I do not know

Whether Medea lives or is dead.

JASON. (*Flings down the sword and sets his shoulder against the door; pushes in vain*)

Open! Open! Open!
(*Returns halfway down the steps, and says pitifully*)

Women, I am alone.

Help me.

Help me to break the bolt.

Go and find help—

(*LIGHT CUE #14*)

(*JASON runs down Right as door opens. This stops him and he turns. It is now fairly dark; the interior of the house is lighted. WOMEN draw back in fear; JASON stands on the steps, bewildered. MEDEA comes into the doorway; her hand and clothing are blood-marked. The door closes.*)

MEDEA.

What feeble night-bird overcome by misfortune beats
at my door?

(JASON takes two steps up to her)

Can this be that great adventurer,
The famous lord of the seas and delight of women,
the heir of rich Corinth—this crying drunkard
On the dark doorstep?—Yet you've not had enough.
You have come to drink the last bitter drops.
I'll pour them for you.

(She displays her hand which is covered with blood.)

JASON.

What's that stain on your hands?

MEDEA.

The wine

I was pouring for you spilled on my hand—
Dear were the little grapes that were crushed to make
it; dear were the vineyards.

JASON.

I came to kill you, Medea,
Like a caught beast, like a crawling viper. Give me
my sons, that I may save them from Creon's men,
I'll go quietly away.

MEDEA.

Hush, they are sleeping. Perhaps
I will let you look at them: you cannot have them.
But the hour is late, you ought to go home to that high-
born bride; the night has fallen, surely she longs
for you.

Surely her flesh is not crusted black, nor her forehead
burned bald, nor her mouth a horror.

(JASON kneels on the steps, painfully groping
for his sword)

She

is very young. But surely she loves and desires
you—

Surely she will be fruitful.—Your sword you want?
There it is. Not that step, the next lower. No, the next
higher.

JASON. (Stands erect. Goes up two steps to her)
I'll kill you first and then find my sons.

MEDEA.

You must be careful, Jason.

Do you see the two fire-snakes
That guard this door?

(Indicating the two snakes)

Here and here: one on each side: two
serpents.

Their throats are swollen with poison,
Their eyes are burning coals and their tongues are fire.
They are coiled ready to strike: if you come near
them,
They'll make you what Creon is. But stand there very
quietly.

I'll let you

Look at your sons.

(MEDEA crosses to pillar Left)

(LIGHT CUE #15)

Open the doors that he may see them.

(The doors open revealing the Two Boys
soaked in blood.)

JASON. (Flinging his hands to his temples and cross-
ing up to pillar Right)

I knew it already.

I knew it before I saw it. No wild beast could have
done it.

MEDEA.

I have

done it: because I loathed you more
Than I loved them.

JASON.

Did you feel nothing, no pity, are you pure evil? I
should have killed you

The day I saw you.

MEDEA.

I tore my own heart and laughed: I was tearing
yours.

JASON. Will you laugh while I strangle you?

MEDEA.

I would still laugh.

(JASON lunges at her but is sent back by snakes)

—Beware my door holders, Jason! these eager serpents.—I'd still be joyful To know that every bone of your life is broken: you are left helpless, friendless, mateless, childless, Avoided by gods and men, unclean with awful excess of grief—childless

(LIGHT CUE #16)

JASON.

It is no matter now
Who lives, or who dies.

(As next speech is said JASON starts slowly down steps to Right.)

MEDEA.

You had love and betrayed it: now of all men
You are utterly the most miserable. As I of women.

But I, as woman, despised, a foreigner, alone
Against you and the might of Corinth,
Have met you, throat for throat, evil for evil, vengeance
for vengeance.

JASON. (Turning to her on bottom step)

What does it matter now?

Only give me my boys: the little pitiful violated bodies:
that I may bury them

In some kind place.

(WARN Curtain.)

MEDEA.

To you?—You would betray even the little bodies:
coin them for silver.

Sell them for power. No!

JASON. (Crawling up two more steps at her feet)

Let me touch their dear flesh, let me touch
their hair!

MEDEA.

No. They are mine.

(HARP EFFECT off Right)

They are going with me: the chariot is at the gate.

(LIGHT CUE #17)

(During this speech JASON rises and goes slowly down Right)

Go down to your ship Argo and weep beside
it, that rotting hulk on the harbor-beach
Drawn dry astrand, never to be launched again—even
the weeds and barnacles on the warped keel
Are dead and stink:—that's your last companion—
And only hope: for some time one of the rotting tim-
bers
Will fall on your head and kill you—meanwhile sit
there and mourn, remembering the infinite evil,
and the good
That you made evil.

(LIGHT CUE #18)

(THUNDER CUE)

(MUSIC CUE)

Now I go forth

Under the cold eyes of heaven—those weakness-despis-
ing stars:—not me they scorn.

(LIGHT CUE #19)

(CRESCENDO MUSIC CUE)

(SCRIM SLOW CLOSING CUE, then)

(LIGHT CUE #20)

(MEDEA goes into the house—JASON starts after her
but the door is bolted in his face. He collapses to
the ground in front of doors. MEDEA is seen com-
ing out Left door bearing the Two Boys. Then as
final fanfare of MUSIC comes slow

CURTAIN